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SUBJECT: NORWEGIAN IRANIANS: A MODEL IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Iranian immigrants in Norway are some of the country's most successful and best-integrated non-Western minorities. There are currently over 15,000 first and second generation Iranians in Norway, making them the tenth largest immigrant group. The community is highly educated, secular, and has many examples of successful and prominent individuals but is split into various segments and does not possess a coherent identity. Any risk of radicalization is considered to be minimal, although there are indications that the Iranian embassy in Oslo has significant negative influence on other Muslim immigrant communities. END SUMMARY.

WHO ARE THEY AND WHERE ARE THEY FROM?  
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12. (U) Norway's 15,000-strong Iranian population is one of its longest-resident non-Western immigrant populations, the majority arriving in Norway over 10 years ago. The first wave fled from the Islamic Revolution, followed by those fleeing the Iran-Iraq War. Today the vast majority of immigrants are either family reunifications or refugees. The Iranian-Norwegian population is growing quickly, mostly in the form of a large number of second generation immigrants born in Norway, although a steady flow of asylum seekers and family members continues to arrive from Iran every year. It is estimated that 20-30% of Iranians in Norway are of Kurdish descent. There are also small numbers of Zoroastrians and Baha'i. Approximately 70% of Iranians have Norwegian citizenship.

13. (U) Norwegian Iranian society is composed of several disparate groups including those who fled the Islamic Revolution, Kurds, other minority groups, members of the People's Mujahadeen and traditional economic migrants. One rough way of looking at these groups is to characterize Iranian immigrants either as those who retain some ties to Iran (primarily economic immigrants), those who oppose the current government of Iran (members of the People's Mujahadeen) and those who have completely adopted a new identity as a Norwegian-Iranian and become secular (more established immigrants, many refugees from the Shah's regime.)

14. (U) Having left the Islamic Republic for Scandinavia, the majority of Iranians resident here are of the more educated, secular variety. Their families are well-off with modern, largely Western value systems. They are also less interested in events in Iran than other groups.

15. (U) A small but vocal element in the Norwegian Iranian community are the approximately 2,000 Iranians who are either members of the People's Mujahadeen or MEK or are sympathetic. This group is perhaps the most organized of all of the Norwegian Iranian subgroups and they are active in protesting against the government of Iran. They have been successful in

engaging several prominent Norwegian politicians to champion the cause of the residents of Camp Ashraf in Iraq.

¶6. (U) An additional category of Iranian immigrant can be described as those who left Iran to escape the Iran-Iraq War or for economic reasons. This group still retains at least a cordial relationship with the Iranian government, as they may occasionally require consular assistance from its embassy. Because these Iranians sometimes travel back to their home country, many are cautious of contact with the embassy due to threat of arrest or harassment by Iranian authorities when they return to Iran.

¶7. (U) As would be expected, the various groups of Iranians are not fond of each other and do not intermingle, despite their common cultural background. Differences in politics and religion prevent the Iranian community from acting cohesively. The non-religious individuals (who are quite numerous) have little in common with their more conservative and religiously observant counterparts, and vice versa.

#### Education as an Indicator of Integration

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¶8. (U) The Iranian community is a very successful and highly integrated group in Norway. Most Iranian-Norwegians have lived here for 15-20 years or longer and can be said to contribute more to the fabric of Norwegian society than Norwegian immigrant society. There are numerous examples of high-profile, successful individuals, and many have married Norwegians and others outside of their nationality.

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¶9. (U) Iranians are some of Norway's most educated immigrants. A remarkably low 16% have just a primary school education or less (including those with no education at all), making it the lowest of any immigrant group. Only the Chileans have a similarly low percentage of those with such a minimal education, at 18%. The average across all immigrants is over 30%. Turks, for example, have a staggering 51% getting by with only a primary school education or less.

¶10. (U) University education is very high among Iranians, with an average of 43.5% either currently in school or having already attained a university degree (including those with a degree from Iran). This percentage dwarfs that of all other immigrant communities with the exception of the Chinese, who post numbers above 50%. The total immigrant average is only around 26%.

¶11. (U) Second generation Iranians in Norway do even better, though curiously, not as well as other second generation immigrants. Thirty-two percent of second generation 19-24 year old Iranian-Norwegians are enrolled in university; higher than the first generation, who, at 25.2%, are around seven points above the average of 18.3%, but slightly lower than the 34.7% total immigrant average for second generation individuals. The point here is that, although Iranians do improve their education numbers, they have not quite improved at the same rate as other groups have.

#### Employment as an Indicator of Integration

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¶12. (U) Employment is an area where Iranians might be described as under-performing, even if only slightly. With 58.3% of first generation individuals aged 15-74 years employed, they post higher numbers than any other immigrants from Muslim countries, yet compared to the total immigrant average of 63.3%, they are relatively unimpressive. It is worth noting that a much higher percentage of Iranian women are employed than any other immigrants from a Muslim background, with 54% working. For comparison, employment among Turkish, Pakistani, and Somali women is much lower, with only 42%, 31%, and 24% in jobs, respectively. Iranian

women are even doing relatively well among all female immigrants, whose average is only a slightly higher 57%. The women employed tend to earn among the highest salaries of immigrant groups, ranking highest among Norwegian Muslim populations.

#### Religion

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¶13. (U) Immigrants from Iran are the least religious group of any in Norway. When first and second generation Iranian immigrants were asked if they still belonged to the religion they were brought up with as children, only 50% answered "yes," while the combined number for all other immigrants is closer to 90%.

¶14. (U) Not surprisingly, the importance most Iranians grant religion in their lives is correspondingly low. When asked to rate this on a scale of 1 - 10 with "1" being "not important at all" and "10" being "very important," the Iranians' average score is around 3.9--again, the lowest of any immigrant group. The total immigrant average is a much higher 6.9. Forty percent of Iranians actually answered this question with a "1," meaning religion is not at all important to them. This is telling, as it reveals that not only have most Iranians left the religion in which they were raised (Islam), but that they have also not converted to another; religion simply is not a part of their lives.

#### Is Radicalization a Risk?

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¶15. (U) Reflecting their overall successful integration into Norwegian society, there appears to be very little risk of radicalization among most Iranian immigrants. There are several possible trouble spots worth mentioning. The first is discrimination, which is unusually high for such a successful and well-integrated population. When asked if they have experienced discrimination of any kind and, if so, how many instances, only 36.3% say they have encountered none at all. The average across all immigrants is 55.6%. Only the Somalis (who have been the subject of considerable

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negative media attention and are considered by many to be an at-risk community) say they have experienced more discrimination, with only 33.9% reporting that they have had no problems with discrimination. Perhaps more worrisome, Iranians have the highest percentage of individuals of any immigrant group that say they have experienced discrimination in "four areas or more," at 4.1%. Here, 3.6% of Somalis say the same, while the total immigrant average is a much lower 1.6%. Discrimination can be considered the main cause for concern over radicalization (even if mild) for the Iranian community.

¶16. (U) The second possible area of concern is the close contact some members of the community maintain with the Iranian government. There is no evidence yet of this being any major cause for alarm, although it could potentially become one in the future. This is particularly so if the individuals who have close contact with conservative elements in Iran are also the same individuals who say they experience higher instances of discrimination. If there were a simultaneous rise in discrimination and an increase in the number of visits to (or contact with) Iran, this could point to a greater risk of radicalization among the Iranian community.

#### Activities of the Iranian Embassy

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¶17. (SBU) Post has been told that the Iranian embassy observes individuals in the secular group, especially those who publicly protest Iranian activities (human rights abuses,

policy, etc.). The Iranian embassy is also active in tracking those who are members of the People's Mujahadeen. Most of these individuals are unable to return to Iran for fear of imprisonment and/or death threats. The Norwegian government has told these individuals to be cautious even if traveling near the Turkish-Iranian border.

¶18. (SBU) Mazyar Keshvari, a prominent Iranian-Norwegian politician in the conservative Progress Party, confirmed this and believes that the Iranian embassy in Oslo carries out significant outreach activities to Norway's Muslim immigrants, funding mosques and encouraging more conservative elements in Islam. Keshvari believes Iranians here are in little or no danger of being influenced by the embassy's efforts because most are too educated, secular, and integrated to be attracted to a conservative Islamic message. There is an Iranian mosque in Oslo which, Keshvari says, the Islamic Republic's embassy uses as a tool to exert some amount of influence on the observant Iranian Muslims here, as well as any other nationalities that also happen to attend. Keshvari (who, it should be noted again, is a regular and vocal critic of Iran) showed particular concern about the Iranian embassy's activities and influence in Norway and was alarmed that the Norwegian government tolerates their actions.

¶19. (SBU) Keshvari also mentioned his suspicion that the Iranian government uses exchange student visas to send intelligence agents to Norway. These people allegedly monitor the Norwegian-Iranian population and at times use Norway as a sort of a safe house useful for raising money and for planning operations in other parts of the world. Keshvari did not believe that the Norwegian police were willing, or perhaps were not able to effectively monitor these individuals.

COMMENT  
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¶20. (SBU) Iranians are arguably Norway's most successful group of immigrants and certainly the most successful among those with Muslim backgrounds. Despite high discrimination, Iranian-Norwegians have managed to become educated, reasonably well-employed, and quite well-integrated. Norwegian-Iranians appear to be a population that is not prone to radicalize, but which could serve as a model for future immigrant integration. Keshvari's description of the Iranian embassy's efforts to negatively influence the Muslim community in Norway seems--although potentially troublesome for other Muslim immigrants--unlikely to affect Iranians themselves.

WHITNEY